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From Convertibles to Slates

MORE THAN A NOTEBOOK

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What Is a Tablet PC?

In general terms, a tablet PC is a notebook computer with a display screen on which users can “write.” The computer’s operating system allows digital “ink” to be written or drawn on the computer screen by using a special pen. This process is called “digital inking,” and hand-drawn items can be saved like any other computer document. Handwritten text can also be saved “as written,” or it can be translated into typed text.



FIGURE 1.1. | The tablet PC

Microsoft Tablet PC

The term “tablet PC” was coined by Microsoft when it released its Windows XP Tablet PC operating system. Consequently, an official Microsoft Tablet PC is essentially a notebook computer with a touch- or pen-enabled screen (digitizer) running Windows XP Tablet PC Edition or Windows Vista.

Since digital inking is added to the normal functionality of a personal computer, applications that run on a personal computer (such as Word or PowerPoint) also run on a tablet PC.

At the time of this writing, Microsoft Windows devices dominate the market for tablet PCs. The technology has also matured since its introduction, as many tablet PC models are now entering their fourth or fifth generation. According to TabletPCReview.com, there are currently more than 20 manufacturers of tablet PCs encompassing more than 50 different models (TabletPCReview, 2007).

Tablet PCs were relatively heavy, and battery life was not long. Mobile processors were just catching on, and available models were expensive and slow. I had a top-of-the-line model with an 800-megahertz processor, 20 gigabytes of disk space, and 512 megabytes of memory. Any dreams in those days of using that first model as a primary computer were out of the question—there simply wasn't enough power. I longed for the day when a tablet PC could serve as my primary machine and thus eliminate the need for a desktop computer. I thought that going totally mobile would be the ultimate in geek heaven. That day came sooner than I thought.

In 2005, I bought a tablet PC with a 1.8 gigahertz processor, 1 gigabyte of memory, 6 hours of battery life and 160 gigabytes of disk space. I still use it today as my primary computer for both work and school. I use it to take notes during meetings, check e-mail, write programs, browse the Web, conduct research, show presentations, record podcasts, and listen to music. I use my tablet in the boardroom, the classroom, on airplanes, on the kitchen table, and on my lap in bed at the end of the day. I use it in a variety of ways: with a wireless Bluetooth keyboard and mouse; docked on my desk at work with a large secondary monitor and a comfortable roller-ball mouse; and with nothing more than a stylus to take notes during class and meetings. I connect to the Internet equally well with wire or without. As an information technology professional, I have always needed both a desktop and a laptop, but not anymore.

For all the functionality I have wrung out of my tablet, I still view it as a fancy, mobile computer. My paradigm is based on what the tablet can *do*. But here's the rub: My kids base their paradigm on what the tablet *is*: a means to knowledge, communication, and even community. What has taken me most of my professional life to understand, they get intuitively.
